United Nations A/65/772

General Assembly

Distr.: General
7 March 2011

Original: English

Sixty-fifth session
Agenda item 69 (a)
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 28 February 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 21 February 2011, from His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, in connection with the HOPEFOR initiative to improve the use of military and civil defence assets in humanitarian response (see annex).

I would appreciate it if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 69 (a).

(*Signed*) Nassir Abdulaziz **Al-Nasser**
Permanent Representative

11-25377 (E) 160311 160311

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 28 February 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

As the 2004 tsunami that devastated South-East Asia and the recent earthquake and floods in Haiti and Pakistan have demonstrated, there has been an increase in the magnitude, frequency and complexity of natural disasters. Those disasters are being compounded by climate change, degradation of the environment and rapid urbanization.

Typically, military and civil defence assets are called upon to distribute relief in emergencies, and those assets certainly have an important role to play in the aftermath of disasters. At the same time, however, questions have been raised about the ways in which those assets have been employed, particularly from a human rights perspective.

Drawing on lessons learned from recent disaster relief operations, the Government of the State of Qatar has proposed the HOPEFOR initiative, which was launched in June 2010 at the International Peace Institute in New York. Its goal is to initiate discussion on the use of military assets in emergencies and identify more effective ways of using those assets while fully respecting humanitarian principles.

Over the past few months, the State of Qatar has held in-depth consultations with a wide range of stakeholders in order further to refine the HOPEFOR initiative. Please find enclosed the initial background paper that emerged from those consultations. It is entitled "HOPEFOR initiative: a global cooperative framework to improve the effectiveness of military and civil defence assets in relief operations". It was prepared by the State of Qatar, with support from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The HOPEFOR initiative will support the best options identified in that background paper for enhancing the use of military assets for disaster assistance. It will start by promoting the establishment of a global network of civilian and military emergency relief practitioners. It will also work to strengthen regional and subregional arrangements, including through the creation of a humanitarian-military centre of excellence.

The State of Qatar would now like to involve other Member States in the continued development and implementation of those options. Towards that end, we plan to submit a draft resolution to the United Nations General Assembly that would welcome reflection on how to improve the use of military and civil defence assets for disaster relief and welcome the HOPEFOR initiative.

The draft resolution will also include mention of our intention to conduct consultations at the expert level and to convene an international conference for a wider group of States and interested governmental and non-governmental parties to discuss progress achieved to this point, the way forward, and recommendations on implementation options in cooperation with the United Nations.

We should be most grateful for the support of Member States of the United Nations, in view of the need for concrete action to improve the international response to natural disasters.

(*Signed*) Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr **Al-Thani**
Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Enclosure

Initial background paper

HOPEFOR initiative: a global cooperative framework to improve the effectiveness of military and civil defence assets in relief operations

The HOPEFOR initiative aims at improving the use of military and civil defence assets (MCDA) in relief operations. As humanitarian needs grow, MCDA are often called upon to support and supplement relief efforts, and they have an important contribution to make. However, recent experience has brought to light certain shortfalls and gaps in their use. The goal of the HOPEFOR initiative is to address those gaps and to improve civil-military coordination in support of the United Nations humanitarian emergency response system for large-scale natural disasters.

The initiative was launched by His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar in New York in June 2010 at the International Peace Institute. That was followed by in-depth consultations with a wide range of stakeholders to further refine the initiative and propose concrete deliverables.

With that in mind, this paper identifies a series of options to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian civil-military coordination and the use of MCDA in relief operations. The HOPEFOR initiative intends to support efforts to further develop and implement these options. As a first step, the initiative might establish a global network of civilian and military practitioners, drawn from both assisting and affected States. It would also promote regional and subregional arrangements, including through the creation of a humanitarian-military centre of excellence in Doha.

Introduction

1. In the coming decades, the number of humanitarian crises is likely to increase as continued and protracted complex emergencies and global challenges exacerbate existing or create new humanitarian needs. In addition, partly because of climate change, natural disasters are predicted to become more frequent and more serious. This development raises the question of how local, national, regional and international capacities for preparedness and response to natural disasters can be strengthened. The major challenge to improving response effectiveness is how to develop regional and subregional mechanisms to assist and expedite neighbour-to-neighbour assistance, especially when foreign MCDA are involved.

2. While domestic military forces have as a rule taken a leading role in responding to natural disasters affecting their own countries, recently there has been a marked increase in the deployment of foreign military forces to support international humanitarian efforts and assist countries affected by large-scale natural disasters. For more than a decade, international military forces have increasingly

been activated to respond to major natural disaster events around the world. In most cases, these military forces have played an effective and necessary role in the overall response, exemplified in the responses to Hurricane Mitch (1998), flooding in Mozambique (2000 and 2001), the Asian tsunami (2004), the Pakistan earthquake (2005), and most recently the Haiti earthquake (2010) and the Pakistan floods (2010). In all those cases, foreign military assets were provided either bilaterally, or under the auspices of a larger organizational structure such as the Caribbean Community, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and deployed upon the explicit request of the host country. In all probability, military actors will continue to play an important role in responding to large-scale natural disasters in the future. While a number of measures have been taken to make such efforts more effective and efficient, there is still much that needs to be done to improve the ways in which international military contingents complement the efforts of the international relief community.

3. In order to establish principles for the provision of military support for disaster relief and facilitate coordination between humanitarian and military actors, the Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil-Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (Oslo Guidelines) were published in 1994. Some 45 countries and 25 organizations took part in the original drafting of the guidelines. Humanitarian actors have long acknowledged that the use of MCDA in disaster response can contribute to overall humanitarian efforts, as long as certain key military principles are respected and taken into account. The Oslo Guidelines provide key definitions and principles on the use of foreign military assets, including the following:

(a) "MCDA should be employed by UN humanitarian agencies as a last resort, i.e. only in the absence of any other available civilian alternative to support urgent humanitarian needs in the time required." (Oslo Guidelines, paragraph 32 (ii)). The concept of last resort is further expanded on as follows: "Military and civil defence assets should be seen as a tool complementing existing relief mechanisms in order to provide specific support to specific requirements. ... Therefore, foreign military and civil defence assets should be requested only where there is no comparable civilian alternative and only the use of military or civil defence assets can meet a critical humanitarian need. The military or civil defence asset must therefore be unique in capability and availability. However, foreign civil protection assets, when civilian in nature and respecting humanitarian principles, can provide an important direct and indirect contribution to humanitarian actions based on humanitarian needs assessments and their possible advantages in terms of speed, specialization, efficiency and effectiveness, especially in the early phase of relief response. The use of civil protection assets should be needs driven, complementary to and coherent with humanitarian aid operations, respecting the overall coordinating role of the UN." (Oslo Guidelines, paragraph 5);

(b) Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, as provided for by United Nations General Assembly resolutions 46/182 and 58/114 (cf. Oslo Guidelines, paragraph 20);

(c) "The sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In this context, humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country

and in principle on the basis of appeal by the affected country" (Oslo Guidelines, paragraph 21);

(d) "As a matter of principle, the military and civil defence assets of forces that may be perceived as belligerents or of units that find themselves actively engaged in combat in the affected country or region shall not be used to support UN humanitarian activities." (Oslo Guidelines, paragraph 23).

4. Owing to the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, efforts have been made to enhance the effectiveness of foreign military assets engaged in disaster response operations. Considerable work has been done to build military response capacity, train humanitarian and military actors in coordination, and capture best practices from individual operations. Central to this effort has been the Civil-Military Coordination Section of OCHA, and in particular the United Nations humanitarian civil-military coordination programme, as well as the work of numerous national militaries in capturing lessons learned from recent operations such as those in Haiti, Mozambique and other places.

5. Experience has demonstrated that military assets provide the greatest utility in supporting disaster-relief operations through the deployment of specific capacities to address specific requirements. Useful resources include rotary-wing and tactical aircraft for airlifts; engineering assets for restoring infrastructure, including clearing rubble from roads, rebuilding bridges and repairing damage to air and seaports; medical support, including trauma medicine; water purification; and where appropriate, security. The provision of such capacities is in keeping with the Oslo Guidelines, which have a clear preference for indirect support and infrastructure support over direct support from military actors. These assets can leverage the capacities of the humanitarian community, and, in the early stages of large-scale disasters, quickly provide additional resources to reduce the imbalance between needs and resources, and thus help to close the humanitarian gap. These lessons, however, have been applied inconsistently in subsequent response operations.

6. In the past, several initiatives to close the humanitarian gap have proposed the establishment of formed units. However, recent experiences have demonstrated the complexity of such an option, and have made it clear that other innovative ways need to be developed to ensure effective use of MCDA for a more reliable and timely response to natural disasters when and where needed.

Identified gaps and challenges

7. There are numerous issues within the existing civil-military coordination framework that need to be addressed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the deployment of foreign military forces in natural-disaster response operations. These gaps are related to the capacities and capabilities of the humanitarian community, foreign military units, and the ability of affected States effectively to integrate the response assets. For affected States, this deficiency can be largely offset by the development and implementation of effective disaster-response plans and capacities, as demonstrated in the response to the flooding in Mozambique in 2000 and 2001, and the Haiti hurricane response in 2004. However, the gaps are generally not related to the numbers and availability of foreign military troops that are deployed to natural-disaster response operations. The problems largely stem from an inability rapidly to deploy the assets that are required; the wrong types of military assets being deployed; ineffective civil-military coordination structures;

lack of military training or experience in disaster-response operations; and poor transition from military to civilian assets. Some of the identified gaps in civil-military coordination and United Nations MCDA capacity-building include, but are not limited to the following:

- Lack of rapid and comprehensive assessment information to identify priorities, needs, and requirements so that national and international assistance efforts, including the use of military assets, can be better directed to the greatest effect (recent experience has demonstrated that there are often too many or unnecessary military assets deployed, and many of these assets remain idle or engage in activities that are not conducive to the most effective response on the ground);
- Lack of predictability in the number and types of military assets that will be provided (the United Nations MCDA directory is inefficient since it is not updated by asset providers and requesting procedures are too bureaucratic, and in practice, assets are identified through direct requests, regional networks and personal contacts);
- Lack of a common operational picture that can be shared among all actors responding to the disaster;
- Lack of consistently effective coordination structures on the ground, such as civil-military operations centres, humanitarian operations centres and joint operations centres;
- Inability to share information effectively and consistently between humanitarian and military actors;
- Difficulties in establishing a "pull" rather than "push" system that effectively and efficiently matches the requirements and gaps identified on the ground with appropriate military assets and capacities;
- Lack of effective training and doctrine for military forces deployed in disaster-response operations;
- Difficulties in identifying effective benchmarks, evaluation criteria, and triggers for transition from military to civilian assets;
- Insufficient numbers of trained and equipped civil-military coordination officers that reflect the geographical and linguistic diversity that is increasingly required;
- Lack of an adequate roster of trained, equipped and readily deployable civil-military coordination officers;
- Lack of a dedicated repository of lessons learned and best practices to guide decision and policymaking.

Preliminary global options to enhance effectiveness[1]

8. Based on the above non-exhaustive list of gaps, the following global options have been preliminarily identified within the MCDA and humanitarian communities as possible ways to increase the effectiveness of civil-military coordination and improve the use of MCDA in disaster response. The HOPEFOR initiative will strive to move forward with refining and implementing some of the options listed below:

(a) Dedicated and specialized training for military forces engaged in disaster response: With formal disaster-response missions increasingly being assigned to national military forces, specialized training is required to make the use of MCDA more effective and less ad hoc than in the past. The provision of specifically trained liaison officers could facilitate real-time information-sharing between deployed military assets and humanitarian actors. Ideally, this training would also include the capacity to train humanitarian actors to work more effectively with military forces. One potential option is establishing one or more training centres to fill this gap, preferably at the regional or subregional level. This initiative should also identify effective implementation tools, such as training of trainers, to ensure the broadest possible reach (both foreign and domestic forces);

(b) Development of military doctrine, best practices, tactics, techniques, procedures, and policies to support and guide both civilian and military actors in disaster-response operations: The need for this stems from the lack of such military training for dedicated disaster-response units in national armed forces. While some individual Member States have developed policies, primarily at the national level, this has not translated into supporting doctrine, best practices, or tactics, techniques and procedures for military actors. One of the goals of this initiative would be the adoption and dissemination of policies that support the existing guidelines (concepts and principles) at the national level. A key component of this initiative would be the creation of a formal platform for the sharing of lessons learned and best practices, as well as for bringing the Oslo Guidelines into the mainstream of military and humanitarian doctrine. Such a platform would both complement and inform the training initiative. Both the training and doctrine development initiatives would assist Member States with international deployments as well as domestic response capacity;

(c) Creation of a global pool of trained and equipped civilian civil-military coordination officers that would take into account the need for geographic and linguistic diversity: These officers would be trained in the various existing guidelines and best practices for the purpose of deploying in various response operations throughout the world. While OCHA has established a pool of trained civil-military coordination officers, requirements on the ground often outstrip capacities. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Post-War and Disaster Reconstruction and Rehabilitation stresses that civil-military coordination is the shared responsibility of all actors. Such a pool of civil-military coordination officers should be available across the humanitarian and military communities. One potential approach would be the establishment of a global pool of trained and equipped civil-military coordination officers, similar to the pool of trained disaster managers that

[1] All initiatives are predicated on an identified and requested need for international MCDA. The use of international military assets would be based on the unique nature of the MCDA, either in timeliness or capability, and would be used to temporarily fill an identified gap in the humanitarian response.

the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination system is able to call upon;

(d) Creation of a more effective, predictable, and rapid civil-military interface in disaster response operations (structured along the lines of civil-military operations centres, humanitarian operations centres, humanitarian assistance coordination centres or the Joint Operations and Tasking Centre) to establish effective dialogue and coordination between humanitarian and military actors early in the response: Concomitant with this would be the development and dissemination of clear guidance on managing civil-military coordination within an international response system similar to the humanitarian cluster system. That would assist in eliminating the ad hoc and parallel structures found in several previous response operations. A potential model for this would be a deployable module similar to the on-site operations coordination centre established for urban search and rescue missions;

(e) Integration of trained civil-military coordination and liaison officers into the United Nations humanitarian coordination system in the field, at the earliest possible stages of international disaster relief efforts, for instance by integrating them into the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination system: This would facilitate the establishment of a "pull" system whereby deployed assets would effectively and efficiently match identified needs and gaps;

(f) Establishment of regional and subregional agreements, standing operational procedures and model status of forces agreements for international MCDA to enhance coordination and response between neighbours (neighbours helping neighbours): A potential model for this could be the expansion and refinement of the Asia-Pacific Conference on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations process;

(g) Development of innovative systems and networks to establish more effective and predictable procedures for requesting and providing MCDA and ensure a more reliable and timely response: That measure would allow a more rapid assessment of the required assets, enabling providing States to take prompt decisions. Model agreements concerning the status of MCDA could be drafted and negotiated in advance. A core element would be the introduction of benchmarks and trigger points for the deployment of MCDA in disaster relief operations. Assets could arrive within one to three days in order to meet needs in the early phase of a large-scale disaster, and could normally leave after four-six weeks, when civilian capacity had been built up;

(h) Development of global information-sharing procedures for humanitarian and military actors with a focus on open disaster-relief operations, including the sharing of assessment and analytical capability in order to take advantage of all available technologies in support of a common operational picture;

(i) Strengthening the capacity of affected States to receive and integrate foreign military assets into a centrally managed coordination structure;

(j) Creation of natural disaster response exercises in order to test the comprehensive response system. There are currently numerous military exercises responding to natural disasters. However, few include realistic scenarios or the participation of humanitarian and civilian disaster management personnel;

(k) Commissioning a thorough study with the ultimate goal of identifying gaps and making recommendations in order to enhance the effectiveness of civil-military coordination and operations. The study could complement the report entitled "Effectiveness of foreign military assets in natural disaster response", which was commissioned by OCHA and prepared by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in 2008. It could incorporate lessons recently learned from large-scale disasters which would help to inform decision-making and policymaking, as well as formulating practical solutions to improve the effectiveness of MCDA deployment;

(l) Enhancing regional and subregional civil-military coordination so as to reflect the work of existing centres of excellence in Hawaii and Australia, including through the establishment of a humanitarian-military centre of excellence in Doha with the following functions:

- Act as a global platform for many such initiatives, providing a regional hub for civil-military coordination, in close cooperation with existing mechanisms and procedures;
- Serve as a civil-military focal point and hub in support of natural disaster response throughout the region;
- Collect and share best practices and lessons learned among regional stakeholders, who would ideally hold high-level meetings in the region at least once a year;
- Train military forces and humanitarian actors on best practices in disaster response operations;
- Act as a source of information and expertise in the development of regional and national policies for the effective use of military assets;
- Develop regional and subregional military-military and civil-military agreements, standard operating procedures and networks in order to enhance overall regional capacities;
- Maintain a database of trained regional civil-military coordination officers who could be deployed in support of regional and national response operations. The database could also be used to support the Civil-Military Coordination Section of OCHA at the global level as necessary;
- Provide linkage with other early-warning and preparedness activities in the region; and
- Act as a model for other regions and subregions to establish similar centres in order to create a global network.

The HOPEFOR initiative alone would not necessarily take forward all the options listed; all relevant stakeholders would take part, and there would be close cooperation with the Consultative Group on the use of MCDA. The HOPEFOR initiative is, however, intended to support efforts to develop, refine and implement some of those options.

Objective of the HOPEFOR initiative

9. In making effective use of military assets, the challenge has often been not so much a lack of forces available for deployment, but rather how to provide the appropriate and necessary forces, equipment and capabilities. Many relevant lessons have been learned and documented, for instance in the 2008 SIPRI report entitled "Effectiveness of foreign military assets in natural disaster response". While it would be useful to update such lessons, the greatest challenge is to apply the lessons already learned to future relief operations and to create the political will to make better use of existing instruments and assets.

10. The purpose of the HOPEFOR initiative is therefore to improve civil-military coordination in the United Nations relief system and to ensure more effective use of MCDA in responses to natural disasters. The objectives of the initiative are as follows:

- Enhance the capacity of the United Nations to assess and identify priorities and needs, including in the use of military assets;
- Improve the ability of affected States to effectively integrate the assets deployed;
- Strengthen cooperation with existing regional arrangements and provide a framework for regional and global coordination;
- Develop innovative ways to build structured and predictable United Nations MCDA capacities for immediate humanitarian emergency relief in response to large-scale natural disasters;
- Improve training for MCDA providers, raise awareness of the Oslo Guidelines and promote their implementation;
- Increase cross-cultural understanding between humanitarian and military disaster relief providers.

11. The HOPEFOR initiative would support and complement the current international humanitarian response structure, while ensuring that it does not duplicate, compete with or hinder any new initiative in terms of financial assets, personnel or attention. The HOPEFOR initiative would be fully committed to the fundamental humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence and assistance based on need alone, and to the Oslo Guidelines on MCDA, particularly the principle of last resort in the use of foreign MCDA.

Way forward

12. In pursuit of its objectives, the HOPEFOR initiative would promote regional and subregional arrangements by establishing a humanitarian-military centre of excellence in accordance with option 8 (l) listed above. Extensive experience and the collection of best practices have shown that regional and subregional arrangements often allow the most effective use of MCDA in assisting countries affected by natural disasters. The reasons include timeliness, proximity, political will and cultural and linguistic similarities among neighbouring States. It is thus possible to build on the principle that neighbours help one another.

13. In parallel, the HOPEFOR initiative would, at an initial stage, encourage the establishment of a global network of civilian and military practitioners from both assisting and affected States. The network could be based on such models as the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and the Consultative Group on the use of MCDA.

14. In addition to those steps, other measures from among the broad options set forth above could be considered in consultation with relevant stakeholders.